

Parenting Views



May ~ June 2006



QUOTE

The great essentials of life are something to do, something to love, something to hope for.

Thomas Chalmers



"Handling Children's Aggression"

Aggression is very common among young children because they don't know how to ask for things they want. As they grow, they develop inner-controls. This process of growth and maturity will not occur all by itself. That job falls to parents.

First, establish the rule that *aggressions will not be tolerated*. In the U.S. many parents feel aggression is okay, especially for boys. On television, in movies, and in print media—acts of aggression and violence get far more play than do acts of kindness and service to others.

Some parents permit aggressive behavior by excusing it with statements like, *"It's just a stage. All two's hit!"* *"Boys will be boys."* But that doesn't mean we don't stop them from hitting.

"All brothers and sisters fight." Siblings can be taught to express their angry feelings without using physical violence. If a sibling gets hit, his desire is to retaliate, so there's more fighting. In houses that utilize fair fighting rules, no one is allowed to hit, kick, bite, or name-call when angry. If they do, they are sent to their rooms.

"She can't help hitting. She's just got a bad temper." Instead try *"You have big feelings, and sometimes it is hard for you to remember not to hit. Until you are better at remembering, I will help you by stopping you from hitting, and having you sit beside me until you cool down."*

"She drove him to it. She just made him so mad, he had to hit her." This keeps a child from being responsible for their own behavior. He and only he is responsible for his actions and you will hold him accountable for them. Instead try, *"I know how angry it makes you when Jim wrecks your block tower; but you cannot hit people when you are angry. You must find another way to tell people how you feel! In this house there will be no hitting used to solve disagreements."* Later you could talk about how important it is not to let other people goad you into taking action you'll regret.

When you excuse children's aggression, you give them a double message. First, you are saying that violence is an okay way to handle problems or get what you want. Second, you tell them that they are not responsible for their own actions, that other people can make them do things which they wouldn't ordinarily do. Both of these messages will have serious implications for later in life as teens and adults.

- **Clearly state acceptable ways of handling aggressive feelings.** *"You can't throw that toy when you are angry, but you can throw these socks."* (Not at anyone.) *"You don't need to stand near your friend when he is pushing."*
- **Be a good role model.** Children with the most aggressive behaviors come from one of three types of homes: where parents use a lot of physical discipline; where few limits are set on children's misbehaviors; and where aggression is used by adults to settle disagreements and get what they want.
- **Set firm limits on misbehavior.** When children break house rules of hitting or kicking, you can exclude them from the family for a short time by putting them in their room or in a chair in an adjacent room or area. They need time to cool down.
- **Praise desirable behaviors.** *"I like the way you remembered the "no hitting" rule. You stopped yourself right away."*
- **Encourage children to use their words rather than actions.** *"You may tell Sam how mad you are, but I can't let you kick."*
- **Point out the consequences of her actions.** *"Look at Louise's face. She is crying. She doesn't like her hair pulled—it hurts!"*
- **Act in a firm way to de-escalate play and stop wild behavior before hitting begins.** *"Let's all come out to the kitchen table now to play with the play dough. We've played enough wild monster games."* Or play wild games outside. These games are less aggressive when kids get to run. ***See ideas on the back page.**
- **Control what they view on television.** Even normal, stable children may react to TV violence by increased aggressive acts.
- **Make certain children get plenty of opportunity for physical play every day.** Climbing, jumping, running, beating drums, and throwing bean bags are all ways to work off aggressive feeling. Water play, play dough, digging in sand, goop (just corn-starch and water on a cookie tray) are very soothing activities.
- **Help children to take greater control over their feelings.** People can choose to not let certain actions bother them and children can decide to ignore particular behaviors of other children! Help children understand. Anger is often a cover for more vulnerable feelings such as shame, sorrow, or envy.



* OUTDOOR ACTIVITES

Hot Potato

Supplies Needed: boom box; bean bag or at your outdoor picnic, use a real potato! Players stand in a circle, and a parent or teen starts the music. Players pass the potato around the circle until the music stops. Whoever is holding the potato when the music stops is out. Play continues until one winner is declared.



Jump Rope Relay

Supplies Needed: two jump ropes. Form two teams and set the boundaries of the race. At the 'Go' signal, the first two players race to the goal and back, jumping rope. The next player goes, and so on, until the winning team is declared.

Hula Hoop Contest

Supplies Needed: Hula hoop for each child. Great for a small group of children. Play music to make it more fun. At the 'Go' signal, players begin 'hula hooping' as long as they can. If the hula hoop drops or players touch it with their hands, they're out!

Outdoor Scavenger Hunt

Supplies Needed: a printed list of nature items for the hunt; a location where nature items such as rocks, bugs, leaves, etc. can be found. Give players or teams the printed list of nature items to find. Some suggestions are rock, leaf, bug, pine cone, twig, something red, yellow, orange, or other color. The first player or team to report back with all of their items wins the prize.

* RAINY DAY (INDOOR) ACTIVITES

Bingo

Supplies Needed: Bingo set and lots of prizes. Cool down at the picnic table with Bingo. Adults and kids love to play, so you can use it during lulls before or after lunch, or when it just gets too hot to run around.

Freeze Dance

Supplies Needed: boom box. Play some wild music and let all the kids dance. When you stop the music, everyone freezes. Any movement, and you're out. Award the prize to the last dancer standing, or to the best dancer.



"Helping Children Understand Their Feelings"

Parents can help children understand their feelings, especially in times of uncertainty.

- ♥ Feelings are important, whether a person is happy, sad, frightened, scared, joyful or carefree.
- ♥ Feelings are normal and natural. They are all okay to have.
- ♥ Sometimes feelings can be mixed-up such as feeling safe and scared at the same time.
- ♥ All feelings are okay. There are no right or wrong feelings.

Source: Carole Gesme, M.A., CFLE, Minneapolis, MN for Family Information Services, Mpls., MN, March 2003

Since September 11, 2001 all of us, including our children, are dealing with grief, sadness, tension, anxiety, fear, anger and other strong emotions. Economic uncertainty only adds to our stress. It is important that we develop long-term strategies to help ourselves and our children cope.

- ♥ Take time to think about and cope with your own feelings.
- ♥ Help your children cope with their feelings by both acknowledging their feelings and reassuring them.
- ♥ Don't try to talk children out of what they are feeling. "It's just a hamster!" For a child, thier first pet and first experience with death is **HUGE!**
- ♥ Share your feelings with your children, depending upon their ages. "I'm sad right now, but I'll be okay in a little while." Be careful not to look to your children for support. (Children don't have life experience or perspective to help adults with their serious problems.) Do you have other support systems in place?
- ♥ Talk to children about constructive ways to handle their anger. For example, running, taking a long walk, deep breathing, talking about happier times helps.
- ♥ Let children know it's okay to ask questions. Answer their questions. Answer their questions directly, but do not give them more information than they need or more than you think they can handle. [There is a story about a little boy who asked where he came from and received a detailed lecture about the facts of life. Do you understand? But Tommy comes from Cleveland so where do I come from? Know what they are asking.]
- ♥ Try maintaining normal activities and routines at home. It helps children feel secure.
- ♥ Monitor what your children see and hear about a tragedy through the media. For example, children seeing the same news story repeated over and over again think it is a terrible thing happening many times, rather than the same event being repeated.
- ♥ Make sure your children eat well and get enough exercise and sleep.

Source: David Walsh, Ph.D., Minneapolis, MN for Family Information Services, Mpls., MN, May 2003

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